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Testimony:

S.B. No. 960 -AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSIONS.

Introduction:

Good evening, my name is Greg Secord; I live at 23 Columbia Street in Hartford, CT. I support SB 960 an Act Authorizing the Establishment of Historic Preservation Commissions. It is my belief that this act will complement the already existing General Statute, Section 7-147, offering another tool to build sustainable communities by building on historic assets.

By way of background, I live in a Historic District in Hartford. I work for a non-profit affordable housing developer that specializes in affordable housing in historic buildings in the Greater Hartford region. We have completed the revitalization of over 400 units and the majority of the projects are in buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Typically those projects have been eligible for historic tax credits. I also serve as the vice chair of the Hartford Historic Properties/Preservation Commission and have served on that commission since 2000.

My views represented in this testimony are mine and are not intended to reflect the views of my employer or the Historic Properties/Preservation Commission.

Prior to 2005 the government of the City of Hartford had developed a culture on not valuing historic assets and as such allowed or took part in the demolition of hundreds of buildings that can never be replaced. A group of citizens who understood the value of leveraging historic assets to create "place" led an effort to develop a Historic Properties Ordinance that was adopted in 2006. The ordinance recognized properties that had already been listed on the National and State Register of Historic Places and offered protection for those buildings an addition to the protection already in place for Local Historic Districts.. The protection was triggered by the application for a building permit that was needed for work being done to the exterior of the building and that could be seen from a public right of way. Examples of work requiring permits includes; window replacement, siding replacement, roof replacement, major porch repair or an expansion/reduction of the footprint of the building and request for demolitions. It did not include minor maintenance or color choices.

The historic properties ordinance differed from the Local Historic District statute in the following ways;

- o The creation of a local district requires the identification and associated research on properties being considered for inclusion in a local historic district
- o Properties in a National/State Register Historic District were identified by an outside body based on criteria established by the National Register of Historic places.

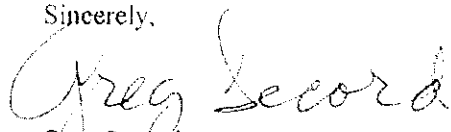
- Property owners had the opportunity to vote as to whether they wanted to be included in a Local Historic District.
- Property owners affected by a historic properties ordinance have the opportunity to voice their opinion during a public hearing process just as they would if this was a zoning regulation change
- The formation of a Local Historic District is more suitable for neighborhoods with a high percentage of owner occupied residential dwellings.
- For example in Hartford there are approximately 80 properties located in a local historic district and about 4,000 located in a National/State register districts.
- The trigger for review of appropriateness for both the local and the national/state districts are similar and are based of established "Design Guidelines"
- Evidence shows that property values benefit from inclusion in a historic district
- In Hartford both the National/State historic districts and the local districts review commission are separate but are made up of the same members.

Since adoption of the Hartford Historic Properties Ordinance in 2006 approximately 3,500 applications for historic review have been processed by staff and the commission. Of those 3,500 applications only 3 applications that were declined were appealed. Two of those decisions were upheld by the appeals body. The overall impact of the ordinance has been extremely positive and in most cases resulted in a collaborative conversation between the commission, staff and the applicant. There is much evidence that the objective of the ordinance is being met and is resulting in a city that is capitalizing on her historic assets rather than viewing them as a liability.

I have also included a white paper titled "Connecticut Local Historic Districts and Property Values prepared for the CT Trust for Historic Preservation by PlaceEconomics in Washington, DC. The paper supports the idea that historic properties, when owners are offered appropriate guidance, increase in value at a faster rate than the same properties without that guidance. It also reflects a higher level of property value stability during periods of economic downturn. This paper gives specific examples of the benefits of historic preservation for many different types of communities and their local historic districts. One can safely draw the conclusion from this report that the same valuation principals would apply for National/State Register Districts.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and the opportunity to share my perspective.

Sincerely,


Greg Secord